

Montana Mutual Aid Frequency Notice

Release Date: May 31, 2013

Mutual Aid Interoperability Channel Modifications for Public Safety Communications along the Montana-Canadian Border

The State of Montana's Public Safety Communication Bureau (PSCB) is pleased to announce the availability of the VLA31 (155.4750 MHz) BLUE Channel as a new general purpose mutual aid interoperability channel for cross-agency use with Canadian responders within 16 km (10 mi) of the US-Canadian border in Montana. This additional authorization is designed to enhance cross-border agency communications. Agencies eligible to use the frequency will be expanded to local, state, tribal, federal and Canadian law enforcement, EMS and fire responders effective June 1, 2013.

Communications representatives in Montana, Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan have worked to improve basic communications and cooperation along the U.S.-Canadian border through the Western Border Interoperability Working Group (WBIWG). In addition, when members of the Northern Tier Interoperability Consortium submitted a grant application for the Dept. of Homeland Security's Border Interoperability Demonstration Project (BIDP), they considered ways to improve border interoperability at a base-line level with Canadian partners.

These two efforts came together when utilization of a common VHF frequency for border coordination became Goal 1 of the Northern Tier's BIDP grant application. VLA31-BLUE was selected because 15 existing base station licenses exist at numerous local, state, tribal and federal law enforcement stations near the border, it is available for use on both sides of the border, and a statewide mutual aid mobile license is already in place through PSCB. Achieving Goal 1 will allow counties and tribes along the Northern Tier to improve interagency incident coordination with Canadian responders within 16 km (10 mi) of the border.

PSCB petitioned the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to expand the purpose of the 155.4750 MHz frequency beyond law enforcement use in this border region. On December 10, 2012, the FCC adopted Order DA 12-1984 (<http://www.fcc.gov/document/state-montana-0>) in response to that petition. As part of the Order's approval process, regional state police

organizations in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota were notified and comments sought. No comments were received.

The approval of the VLA31-BLUE Channel use along the border holds great promise for improving base-line interoperability for U.S. and Canadian first responders. Effective June 1, 2013, the State of Montana will allow law enforcement, fire and EMS agencies to apply for permits to use 155.4750 MHz as described above. Here is a list of requirements for using this frequency:

- For emergency, interagency use only.
- Primary use for law enforcement, EMS or fire agencies adjacent to or those that will potentially operate at or within 16 km (10 mi) of the U.S.-Canadian border in Montana.
- Critical non-law enforcement, EMS or fire agencies who routinely respond to incidents at or within 16 km (10 mi) of the U.S.-Canadian border in Montana can be authorized only with a local, state or tribal law enforcement endorsement.
- Completion of a State of Montana Mutual Aid Frequency on-line permit application at <https://app.mt.gov/mutualaid/> for a new permit or to update an existing permit.
- Documentation/justification of the need for interagency communications within 16 km (10 mi) of the U.S.-Canadian Border in the on-line permit request is required.
- Use is not authorized until an approved permit is issued.
- Statewide use of 155.4750 MHz outside of this specific zone is restricted to law enforcement only per the *Mutual Aid and Common Frequencies Manual*.

Modification of this mutual aid interoperability channel will facilitate better and more efficient communication on cross-border incidents. The PSCB and Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan representatives continue work to make the 155.4750 MHz frequency a common resource for incidents on **both** sides of the border. For more information, please contact Scott Bradford, PSCB Mutual Aid Frequency Manager.

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